

CODE-SWITCHING PRACTICES AMONG ENGLISH TEACHER IN EARLY CHILDHOOD IN BILINGUAL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This study aims describe how English teacher use code-switching practices in the classroom. The participants of this study are four teachers with experience teaching in kindergarten in Pontianak. This study was qualitative approach through case study. The data were collected by in-depth interviews. The result of this study that teachers used three types of code-switching: tag-switching, inter-sentential switching, and intra-sentential switching. These strategies were primarily employed to clarify instructions, manage classroom behavior, build rapport, and adapt to students' varying levels of English proficiency. The frequency and manner of code-switching were also influenced by the children's age group and the teachers' years of teaching experience. Teachers of younger learners tended to switch languages more frequently to ensure comprehension, while more experienced teachers applied code-switching more selectively and strategically. This study concludes that code-switching should not be viewed as a sign of linguistic deficiency but rather as a responsive and effective pedagogical tool. Further research is recommended to examine the long-term impact of code-switching on bilingual development and to investigate its implementation in broader educational contexts.

Keywords: Bilingual, Code-Switching, Early Childhood Education, Sociolinguistic

INTRODUCTION

Language diversity is a distinctive aspect that reflects a society and identity. Keraf (1997) states that language is a system used by humans to communicate in social life through sound symbols produced arbitrarily by the speech organs. Therefore, language acquisition does not occur automatically but is strongly influenced by social interactions (Anggraini et al., 2023). A child acquires their first language through the mother tongue, which plays a vital role in cognitive development and learning ability (Nishanthi, 2020). The mother tongue not only forms the basis of a child's thinking but also serves as a foundation for acquiring a second language, such as English. In the context of early childhood education, particularly in multilingual and multicultural international schools, children are often exposed to learning environments where English is the primary language of instruction, even though they come from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Language is acquired not only from parents or the surrounding environment but also through schools and classroom settings, which are critical sites for foreign language acquisition. English language learning focuses on four key skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Anggraini et al., 2023). Ika Surya and Mufidah (2023) stated that teaching English to young children is both possible and effective when adjusted to their age and other learning-related factors. In this process, the teacher plays a central role in integrating language into children's learning experiences.

However, teaching English to young children is not a simple task. It requires a joyful, interactive approach tailored to their developmental stages to ensure effective and enthusiastic learning. English may often be the main language spoken by children, but their language choice depends on who they are communicating with (Pallàs, 2021). English teachers face considerable challenges in the classroom. This is consistent with findings in Indonesian kindergartens, where teachers report that children often struggle with English pronunciation, such as with words like *sister* and *grandfather* (Listiyani, 2023). Teachers often need to repeat words multiple times until the children can pronounce them correctly. In practice, full use of English is rare, and Indonesian is still commonly spoken in classrooms. Constant use of English may confuse children who are not yet familiar with the language thus, selective use of Indonesian is considered an appropriate pedagogical choice (Fikroni, 2022). To address these challenges, many teachers adopt code-switching strategies, alternating between English and Indonesian to clarify instructions and support students' comprehension of learning materials. In educational settings that adopt bilingual or multilingual methods, code-switching is frequently employed to enhance comprehension and support the overall teaching and learning experience (Anggrestia, 2024). From a sociolinguistic perspective, code-switching is not a random phenomenon but a socially meaningful choice.

Sociolinguistics, as described by Gumperz's Interactional Sociolinguistics Theory (1982) highlights that code-switching serves communicative functions such as clarifying meaning, signaling relationships, and adjusting levels of formality. Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model (1993) further explains that speakers choose between "unmarked" codes, which follow social expectations, and "marked" codes, which signal a shift in social meaning. For teachers, English may represent the unmarked code for instruction, while Bahasa Indonesia becomes the marked choice to build rapport or maintain discipline. According to Gumperz (1982), code-switching is a form of communication or conversation that helps establish shared understanding by conveying information in terms that are familiar to the interlocutor. Furthermore, Agudo (2017) defines code-switching as the process of shifting between two or more languages within the same discourse or conversation. The using of code-switching to help students understand better, adjust formality and humor, overcome vocabulary limitations, and discuss topics using a more familiar language (Sutrisno & Mulyono, 2023). The study reveals that permitting language switching, known as code-switching, plays a helpful role in children's

learning of a new language (Kavak, 2020). Poplack (2004) identifies three types of code-switching: inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag-switching. Inter-sentential switching occurs when the language shift happens between sentences or turns in a conversation (Eldin, 2014). Intra-sentential switching, on the other hand, takes place within a single sentence structure—at the level of clauses, phrases, or even individual words—and is considered more complex than inter-sentential switching. Meanwhile, tag-switching involves the insertion of short elements, such as discourse markers or greetings, from one language into a sentence in another language.

In addition, Gumperz (1982) categorizes the functions of code-switching in educational contexts into six main types. These include quotation, where switching is used to convey someone else's speech; addressee specification, which signals who is being addressed to encourage listener engagement; and interjection, which involves inserting exclamations or short phrases from one language into another. Message qualification is another function, allowing speakers to clarify or add information, while repetition involves restating an utterance in another language for emphasis or reinforcement. Finally, personalization/objectification helps differentiate between personal opinions and neutral or general information based on linguistic choice.

Similarly, Chowdury (2012) outlines five main reasons teachers use code-switching during classroom instruction. These include maintaining discipline, where the first language is used to manage the class or correct students more effectively, and addressing student ability differences, since not all learners fully understand material presented in English. Teachers also switch codes to facilitate explanation and to translate new terms when English equivalents are difficult for students to remember. Additionally, code-switching helps build rapport, enabling teachers to foster a warmer and more personal connection with their students.

This aligns with (Lukito et al., 2022) found that in Indonesian elementary schools, code-switching occurs due to the limited English proficiency of both students and teachers, and is used to aid communication, maintain order, and express emotions in class. Similarly, Nona et al. (2024) discovered that teachers use code-switching to clarify lesson content and to express emotions because eleventh-grade students had limited English skills. Additionally, Herawati and Sarah Fitriani (2021) noted that teachers switch between English and Indonesian to help students understand English grammar more effectively. This study shows that code-switching not only aids communication but also supports students' understanding and social interaction. When used effectively, it can enhance learning and relationships, making it a valuable strategy in bilingual education (Al-Musthofa & D'angelo, 2024). Leo and Sudarmawan (2022) found that the teacher used form of code-switching like inter-sentential switching, particularly when explaining instructional content sentence by sentence. Based on the discussion above, this study aims to describe the code-switching practices employed by English teachers in early childhood education at international schools. Although teachers are required to use

English as the medium of communication, this raises the question of whether Indonesian is also being used in the classroom. Code-switching has emerged as a significant linguistic phenomenon in the teaching and learning process, especially when young learners are situated in multilingual environments and are exposed to English as a second language (L2), which serves as the language of instruction in schools.

The research gap identified in this study lies in the limited scholarship that specifically examines code-switching practices by teachers in early childhood education at international schools, particularly within the Indonesian context. Previous studies have predominantly focused on elementary or secondary school teachers or were conducted in national school settings. As a result, they have not fully captured the unique complexity and linguistic diversity that characterize international early childhood classrooms, where learners often come from varied language backgrounds.

Recognizing the gap, the present study aims to address it by pursuing several key research objectives. First, the study seeks to identify the types of code-switching used by English teachers in early childhood education at international schools. In addition, it aims to examine the functions of code-switching within the teaching and learning process for young learners in these multilingual environments. Finally, the study intends to explore the factors that influence teachers to employ code-switching in early childhood international classrooms. Collectively, these objectives are designed to provide a deeper understanding of how and why code-switching occurs in this specific educational context.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative method using a case study approach. Creswell (2014) describes qualitative researchers as individuals who personally gather data through methods such as examining documents, conducting interviews, or observing behaviors. As Creswell (2012) notes, qualitative research seeks to understand the meanings individuals assign to a phenomenon within a real-life context. To collect research data, an interview was conducted for 60 minutes, recorded, and then transcribed. The protocol for conducting interview included obtaining permission from the school and the teachers to be interviewed to ensure their availability. Then, the data were analyzed using thematic analysis, involving the coding of interview data, identification of patterns, and categorization of emerging themes related to code-switching practices in early childhood education settings. The teachers were asked to review the quotations and findings related to their statements. This process aimed to confirm that the researcher's interpretations accurately reflected the participants' intended meanings, and to give them an opportunity to correct or add information if necessary.

The participants in this study were four teachers who specialize in teaching English at a kindergarten school in Pontianak. Among them, two teachers have two years of teaching experience with students aged 3–4 years, one teacher has one year of experience

teaching children in the same age group (3–4 years), and the remaining teacher has one year of experience teaching students aged 2–3 years. The selection of the international kindergarten as the research site was based on the linguistic characteristics of the environment, where both teachers and students come from multilingual background. education level. Participants 1, 2, and 3 taught at the playgroup level (ages 3–4). Participant 1 had one year of teaching experience, while Participants 2 and 3 each had two years of experience. Participant 4 taught children aged 2–3 and had one year of teaching experience. Then, the reason school where the study was conducted is an international based institution where English is the primary language used in daily communication, both in teaching activities and general interactions within the school environment. However, the majority of students come from various first language backgrounds, and most are accustomed to using Bahasa Indonesia at home. As a result, their English proficiency varies significantly. Some students are able to understand simple instructions in English, while many others still have limited speaking skills even in their first language.

At the playground level (ages 2–4), children's verbal abilities are generally still developing. To address this challenge, teachers often employ the strategy of code-switching, that is, switching from English to Bahasa Indonesia, especially when students appear confused, fail to respond to instructions, or have difficulty understanding lessons. Interestingly, in this context, code-switching is not used to explain academic content in depth. This is because teachers at this level act as full-time homeroom teachers, focusing more on giving daily instructions and establishing classroom routines. Teachers typically begin communication in English, but when children fail to understand even after the instruction has been repeated, they switch to Bahasa Indonesia for clarification. This strategy is considered effective in enhancing comprehension and building students' confidence in communicating, both in English and Bahasa Indonesia.

RESULTS

This The majority of students come from various first language backgrounds, and most are accustomed to using Bahasa Indonesia at home. As a result, their English proficiency varies significantly. Some students are able to understand simple instructions in English, while many others still have limited speaking skills even in their first language. At the playground level (ages 2–4), children's verbal abilities are generally still developing. To address this challenge, teachers often employ the strategy of code-switching, that is, switching from English to Bahasa Indonesia, especially when students appear confused, fail to respond to instructions, or have difficulty understanding lessons. Interestingly, in this context, code-switching is not used to explain academic content in depth. This is because teachers at this level act as full-time homeroom teachers, focusing more on giving daily instructions and establishing classroom routines. Teachers typically begin communication in English, but when children fail to understand even after the

instruction has been repeated, they switch to Bahasa Indonesia for clarification. This strategy is considered effective in enhancing comprehension and building students' confidence in communicating, both in English and Bahasa Indonesia.

The Types of Code-Switching

The study found that teachers used all three types of code-switching as categorized by Poplack (2004): tag-switching, inter-sentential switching, and intra-sentential switching.

Tag-Switching

This type involves the insertion of short elements such as “*ya*,” “*loh*,” or “*oke*” from *Bahasa Indonesia* into English sentences. All participants used this type during the teaching process.

Teacher 1: “*Listen ya*” or “*Tidy up oke*” used to reinforce instructions and create a more interactive atmosphere.

Teacher 2: “*Sit down ya. like that loh*” to reduce confusion and aid understanding.

Teacher 3: “*Eat your egg ya*” to remind children to complete an activity.

Teacher 4: “*No no, run ya*” as a warning or to get the child’s attention.

Inter-Sentential Switching

In this form, teachers delivered a sentence in English followed by its translation in *Bahasa Indonesia*.

Teacher 3: “*Sit down, duduk. Open your bottle, buka minumnya*” used to clarify commands, not explain content.

Teacher 4: “*Line up. Baris. You want to pee? Kamu mau pipis? Today we will study about alphabet A (Hari ini kita akan belajar alfabet A)*” used for discipline and introducing material.

Intra-Sentential Switching

Teachers mixed both languages within a single sentence.

Teacher 3: “*Open your kotak bekal*” used to give commands.

Teacher 4: “*Tidy up tas mu*” and “*Put on your sepatu*” giving directions using mixed languages.

The Function of Using Code-Switching

The analysis further demonstrated that the forms and uses of code-switching employed by the teachers align closely with the functional categories proposed by Gumperz (1982). First, the function of *quotation* was observed when teachers reproduced children’s speech or familiar expressions from the learners’ environment. For example, Teacher 2 used the phrase “*Like that loh*” to imitate a child’s typical speech pattern.

The function of *addressee specification* also emerged, particularly when teachers switched to Bahasa Indonesia to ensure that specific children clearly understood the intended message. This is illustrated by Teacher 4's utterance, "No no, run ya," which was directed at an individual learner.

Instances of *interjection* were identified through the insertion of expressions such as "ya," "loh," and "oke," which served to add emphasis or emotional nuance. For example, Teacher 1 frequently produced utterances such as "Listen ya" and "Tidy up oke," while Teacher 3 used phrases such as "Eat your telur rebus" and "Tidur ya, sleep dulu."

The function of *message qualification* was evident when teachers used Bahasa Indonesia to clarify instructions initially delivered in English. Teacher 3, for instance, combined "Take pencil" with a follow-up directive, "repeat after me," while Teacher 2 reinforced the instruction "Line up ya" by adding the clarification "baris-baris."

Repetition was another observable function, whereby teachers restated key instructions in both English and Bahasa Indonesia to reinforce comprehension. Teacher 1's utterance "Put on your sock yuk" and Teacher 2's repeated use of "Line up ya, baris-baris" exemplify this strategy.

Finally, the function of *personalization/objectification* was reflected in teachers' strategic use of Bahasa Indonesia to establish rapport and foster a sense of emotional closeness, while English was reserved primarily for academic purposes. Teacher 3 stated, "I often use Bahasa Indonesia in daily conversations outside lessons," and Teacher 2 noted that "Children feel closer and less afraid when I talk to them in Bahasa Indonesia." Collectively, these findings illustrate how code-switching serves multiple pedagogical and relational functions in early childhood international classrooms.

The factor Using Code-switching

Interviews with the four English teachers at the international early childhood education school revealed that their use of code-switching is shaped by a range of practical, pedagogical, and psychological considerations within the classroom. These findings correspond closely with the five main reasons for code-switching in instructional settings identified by Chowdhury (2012).

First, *addressing student ability differences* emerged as a primary motivation. Teachers reported that the diverse levels of English proficiency among learners often required them to shift to Bahasa Indonesia to ensure comprehension. As Teacher 1 explained, "If they can't yet, I help them using Bahasa Indonesia," while Teacher 3 noted, "They understand a bit, but it's hard for them to speak, so I help by switching." Such adjustments were crucial for supporting students who struggled to follow instructions delivered solely in English.

Second, code-switching served the function of *facilitating explanation*. Teachers used Bahasa Indonesia to clarify complex concepts or lengthy instructions more efficiently, reducing confusion and maintaining the flow of teaching. Teacher 4 remarked, "Sometimes if the explanation is too long, I just use Bahasa Indonesia so the kids understand faster," and Teacher 1 similarly stated, "I need to help them faster with Bahasa Indonesia if they don't get it after several tries." These examples highlight how code-switching helped streamline communication and enhance instructional clarity.

A third factor involved *building rapport*. Teachers indicated that using Bahasa Indonesia in informal interactions or personal conversations fostered a sense of comfort and

emotional closeness with students. Teacher 3 commented, “I often use Bahasa Indonesia in everyday conversations outside of class. It helps children feel closer and more at ease,” while Teacher 2 observed, “Kids feel closer and less scared when I talk to them in Bahasa Indonesia.” Such practices underscore the interpersonal value of code-switching in supporting young learners’ emotional security.

Another key motivation was *maintaining discipline*. Teachers reported switching to Bahasa Indonesia when managing behavior or addressing distressed children, as the language felt more accessible and authoritative to students. As Teacher 4 explained, “If a child is crying or scared, I usually use Bahasa Indonesia to help calm them down,” and Teacher 3 added, “They listen better when I use Bahasa Indonesia. It helps them feel safer.” In these instances, code-switching functioned as a tool for effective classroom management and emotional regulation.

Collectively, these factors demonstrate that code-switching operates not merely as a linguistic phenomenon but as an essential instructional strategy that supports effective, responsive, and inclusive pedagogy within multilingual early childhood classrooms.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that code-switching serves both linguistic and pedagogical functions in the teaching of English to early childhood learners in multilingual classrooms. Teachers utilized code-switching not only to bridge students’ comprehension gaps but also to foster an inclusive and emotionally supportive learning environment. The three types of code-switching identified tag-switching, inter-sentential switching, and intra-sentential switching illustrate teachers’ flexibility in adjusting their language use based on students’ needs and language proficiency. Teachers typically began with English instructions and then switched to Indonesian when students appeared confused or unresponsive (Poplack, 2004; Eldin, 2014). The functional analysis based on Gumperz (1982) framework revealed that code-switching serves crucial communicative purposes such as clarifying messages, maintaining student engagement, and managing classroom routines. In particular, the use of Bahasa Indonesia in more personal contexts helped reduce students’ affective barriers, encouraging them to participate more actively in class communication. This supports previous studies (Chowdhury, 2012; Lukito, 2022), which emphasize that code-switching strengthens teacher-student rapport and enhances teaching effectiveness, especially when learners have limited English proficiency. Gusti et al. (2019) study found that teachers use code-switching as a teaching strategy to deliver and clarify content and to facilitate communication in bilingual classrooms. These findings align with Gumperz (1982) Interactional Sociolinguistics Theory, which views code-switching as a socially meaningful communicative strategy. The selective use of Bahasa Indonesia for rapport-building and discipline reflects Myers-Scotton’s (1993) Markedness Model, where teachers switch to a marked code to achieve specific social and pedagogical goals.

These results also align with (Nashruddin et al., 2024), which revealed that English teachers use three forms of code-switching inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag-switching during the teaching and learning process. Code-switching was used to confirm understanding, motivate learners, introduce new vocabulary, explain grammar, and provide

translations. As a result, it positively impacted students' comprehension and engagement in English learning. Similarly, Prabowo and Ambarini (2022) argued that teachers use code-switching to capture students' attention and to encourage them to speak English. Teachers and students use code-switching to build social connections and solidarity, with teachers easing students' anxiety and students showing care for their peers, making code-switching a deliberate communication strategy to support the learning process, not merely a result of language limitations (Sita et al., 2020).

Purma and Meristika Moetia (2023) also found that teachers employ code-switching due to students' lack of English mastery. She identified examples of tag-switching such as "No, bukan," inter-sentential switching such as "So, I told you before, seperti yang miss sampaikan sebelumnya," and intra-sentential switching like "Gimana rabbitnya tadi". Among these types, inter-sentential switching was used most frequently because translating content directly made it help for students to understand the lesson. In addition, Arifin et al. (2017) noted that teachers use code-switching to simplify complex material. This approach allows teachers to scaffold their instruction, helping children grasp the content more effectively especially important in early language development stages (Melysa & Pasaribu, 2021).

Kindergarten teachers use code-switching, mainly insertion and inter-sentential types, to help students better understand the material, especially those less proficient in English, making this strategy important in multilingual learning environments. Moreover, this study found that the way teachers use code-switching is also influenced by the age group they teach and their teaching experience. Teachers working with younger age groups 2–3 years old tend to use more frequent code-switching particularly tag-switching and inter-sentential forms since students at that stage still have very limited verbal abilities in both English and *Bahasa Indonesia*. Meanwhile, teachers with more years of experience appear to be more strategic and selective in their use of code-switching, adjusting it according to the situation and individual student needs. This indicates that both the teaching context and a teacher's professional experience shape the linguistic strategies they choose to implement in multilingual classrooms. Overall, the findings from this study and supporting literature reinforce the view that code-switching is not merely a random or spontaneous language alternation, but rather a deliberate and responsive teaching strategy. It reflects teachers' awareness of their students' linguistic needs and the realities of working in multilingual educational settings. As such, effective use of code-switching can enhance the quality of English instruction and lead to improved learning outcomes in early childhood education.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that code-switching is an integral part of English language instruction in early childhood education at International. The findings demonstrate that teachers employ three primary forms of code-switching tag-switching, inter-sentential switching, and intra-sentential switching to support communication, comprehension, and classroom management. These strategies are used not only to deliver instructions and clarify meaning, but also to build rapport with young learners, maintain discipline, and simplify complex content. The use of code-switching is deeply influenced by several factors, including

students' varying levels of English proficiency, the need to explain abstract concepts, and the emotional needs of children in multilingual environments. Furthermore, teachers' teaching experience and the age group they teach also shape how frequently and in what manner code-switching is used. More experienced teachers tend to apply it more selectively, while those teaching younger age groups rely on it more frequently due to students' limited language skills. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the code-switching practices observed in this study highlight the dynamic interplay between language choice, social relationships, and pedagogical effectiveness. The findings reinforce that code-switching in early childhood bilingual classrooms is a strategic adaptation to the social context of learning, rather than a deficiency in language proficiency

On the other hand, this research confirms that code-switching is not a sign of linguistic deficiency, but rather a responsive and strategic pedagogical tool that enhances the learning experience for early learners. It enables teachers to create a more inclusive and supportive language environment where children feel safe to explore and use a second language. Given the limited number of participants and the context of a single international kindergarten, future research could broaden the scope by involving more schools across different regions or countries to capture more diverse practices of code-switching. Comparative studies between national and international early childhood education settings could also provide deeper insights into how institutional policies influence language practices. Additionally, future research may explore the long-term impact of code-switching on children's bilingual development, language retention, and confidence in using English. Investigating parental perspectives and home language practices could also complement classroom-focused studies and provide a more holistic understanding of multilingual language acquisition in early childhood.

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